He takes on many forms. He can be seen in the brush as a gazelle feeding on wild tomatoes and onions. As a ram with golden fleece and wearing ear ornaments, he travels underground along gold veins. As a young and seductive woman he goes to the villages to seduce the boys and take them away with him. He is the head of the fleeting torrent that runs after a rainfall; he is the seething and swelling of the currents. He can be recognized in the bluish haze that floats above the ponds. A stream that dries up is a sign of his anger.

Faro's Realm

At the beginning, the waters that originated in the "central springs of the sky" and streamed over the earth, were pure, clear, beneficial and "easy." But after Mousso Koroni's betrayal and that of the beings who listened to her, impurity was communicated to the earth /45/: the water that covered the earth clouded, changed color, and became "difficult." It either dried up or, on the contrary, flooded the land, drowning living beings.

Today only the streaming rain water has preserved its character, more especially the first rain that falls at the beginning of winter. It is considered a purifying agent par excellence and is called dane sandyi, "water that sows," for it brings to the grains their soul, ni; the earth, sterile and "empty," becomes full and fertile, plants are reborn, animals and insects multiply (1).

1. A person who is generous and good is referred to as being like this first rain. It is also said of the spirit: "the spirit [is good like] the first rain" (miri dane sandyi).

The terrestrial waters, Faro's kingdom, are classified into seven distinct realms. They are in layers which correspond to the seven parts of the sky and earth.

The first, dyi woyo "seething water," is surface water: it seethes when Faro makes himself known, and overflows in floods, as the heads of streams are swelled by the storm. It is also the lustral water used for purification and the water drawn for drinking.

776 precision of which the native substratum seems unaware. In any event, there is no Bambara word for "God" except the one [177] brought by the Moslems -- "Allah," pronounced as Ngala. This lack of a Bambara word may be explained by their custom of avoiding pronouncing the name of powerful people for fear of incurring their wrath.

There is no superior spirit of evil: Seïtane [Satan] is [177] likewise a Moslem introduction. The Bambara does not visualize a hierarchy of spirits.

Finally, it must be concluded, from the existence of 776 many magic practices, that there is a belief in a kind of uni- 778 versal energy, which is diffuse by nature and which, by appropriate 789 means, one can capture and use as one likes. Certain genii or gods are merely emanations of this invisible, imponderable and active force, which no obstacle can stop and which can instantly overcome space and strike at a distance. This is the basis of all native magic.

[129] 2. Morality and Customs

776 When, as among Catholics and Moslems, the after-life is believed to be influenced by one's conduct in this life, there ●577 is a rule which determines what is and what is not proper if one wishes to earn the greatest possible rewards in the life to come. The saints and pious men have shown the way to this end.

For the Bambara, however, the next life is merely a continuation of this one and he does not think that he can, by conduct, improve his chances in the next life since it offers no rewards or punishments for his day-by-day actions. Neither his manes nor his genii give him an example of conduct to guide him. Therefore, without thought of the future, he goes along solely concerned with the present; he seeks what will give him pleasure, tries to avoid what seems harmful, and all this in a groping way, as one walks in the dark.

577 Sometimes, it is true, he is led to behave with a degree 626 of decency and to avoid certain too shocking lapses, which would expose him to reproach, alienate his friends and create for him

577 an uncomfortable situation among his own family; but under-
626 neath this surface, the evil shows through. It is not unusual to
577 be faced with a disconcerting absence of moral sense, ferocious
157 egotism, deep-seated duplicity, impudent treachery and cold, unperturbed cruelty (1). And one can see, perhaps in all of

1. The chronicle of Ségou, especially, attests this tradition of trickery and hypocrisy (see especially the tales about Ma-n-son, p. 93, and about Da, p. 101).

them, the scorn and even hatred felt for anyone who is unfortunate, weak, ill or abandoned. However, it should certainly be noted that there are also Bambara who display the most disinterested devotion, generous hospitality and remarkable courage; some even give evidence of that kind of inborn distinction which is to be found among even the most primitive peoples and which is the mark of superior people.

183 Thus, no code organizes Bambara rules of life. Everything depends upon custom, that mysterious thread, at once fragile and strong, which links the generations one with another [130] and which sustains the individual, though he is unaware of it, to such an extent that he is completely lost without it. Handed down by earlier generations, superstitiously preserved, it is imposed through fear of the punishment which will follow transgression. At first glance, custom appears to be an amalgam of the most heterogeneous elements and that is why we Europeans find it at once respectable and ridiculous, good and bad, useful and futile, sometimes atrocious and then again excellent. On closer study it is seen to exhibit, on the basis of feelings common to all humanity, an efflorescence peculiar to the native milieu, a natural morality which duplicates positive laws.

It is the nature of man to observe certain laws, to see the good and the bad in what surrounds him and, in his conduct, to display a leaning toward the good and an aversion to the bad. He recognizes within himself something which criticizes his actions from a similar point of view and, which, in fact, judges them.

596 It is the duty of the fa to see to the cult. He projects
614 everything that happens to him personally to the supernatural
787 plane so as to come to conclusions that will guide his own conduct. He discerns in the most ordinary dreams indications of what will please the dead. Furthermore, the people around him point out the signs of divine will that they have observed. If, as happens in great houses, the fa is obliged to turn over part of his responsibility to the family gods to one of his confidantes, the latter will not fail to keep him informed of anything significant that may be revealed.

[577] Thus, daily life is unceasingly dominated by the supernatural, and every important event is conditioned by these beliefs. This is readily seen in all the family institutions: birth, circumcision, marriage, and death.

[577] It follows that the moral behavior of the family is a concern of the fa. Whenever something abnormal or painful occurs, the fa looks into it. Do the dead perhaps have reason to be dissatisfied? Have they been neglected or offended? He questions them, and if he finds confirmation for his suspicions, he at once seeks to appease the manes in whatever way they desire. If the trouble persists, he investigates further, and sometimes everyone in the house is questioned or, if one prefers, made to confess, even infants. Could one of them, moved by ill feeling, have uttered maledictions when invoking the dead?

614 When the fa himself is ill, this general confession is
596 virtually obligatory. This is because the absolute authority of
783 a fa can hardly fail to arouse hatred, and hatred, a bad counselor, makes people resort to magic to rob the more powerful of life.
[578] Fear that the elder's "clairvoyance" will discover the wickedness in the depths of one's soul and punish it usually induces the guilty person to obtain a pardon for his wrongdoing by confessing it, and then everything returns to normal.

596 Upon the death of the fa, it is the first duty of his suc-
614 cessor to try to discover, by any means, the causes of death and to avenge it if need be.
[763] Everything which the old fa was wont to honor, which forms the spiritual treasure [180] of the family, must also be

771 "believe or die" of the Moslems by taking up their spears, and when
798 they were conquered, reduced to servitude, and unable to continue
778 their worship openly, they remained true to the faith they received from their ancestors. Severed heads became the prey of vultures, and spilled blood flowed, but those that survived only became hardened. The Moslem conquerors, tired of striking and in need of slaves and manpower, had to admit their defeat in the field of religion.

Some fell away from the idols (slaves, and some rich people seeking to safeguard their lives and possessions), but their apostasy was strictly external and a lie, for they shouted the formula but in secret devoted themselves to their bloody rites, imbuing their children with their own faith and not that of their masters. A lie has never [517] been difficult for the Bambara; to know how to lie is for them more than half a virtue. Thus, when the right to freedom was proclaimed [567] in 1907, I was not at all surprised to see that out of nearly 5,000 slaves who spontaneously set themselves free, the majority returned to their homes or to the land of their fathers, forgot the formula, and declared themselves to be fetishists. They did not get initiated then since they already had been (1).

1. Those who took back their own freedom in 1907 were all slaves of the Moslems. The "Peulls" /Fulani/, a shepherd people, saw almost all their slaves escape. The Bambara in slavery kept their traditions as well as they could; in the Negro village of Biskra I found sons of the Bambara who did not know their own language and were fanatical Moslems, yet kept their tattoos, sacrificed to the family boli handed down by their fathers, danced the dance of the korodouga, and used the Bambara formulas and songs although they no longer understood them.